thirty eight

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thirty eight

by but_at_least_i_have_an_iced_coffee

Summary

A ten year old Erik watches as Wilhelm cries.

Their nanny telling him that it's not fair to eat the carrots but not the broccoli is the source of his tears. To a ten year old crown prince who is being raised to carry a nation, he thinks it's a stupid thing to be upset over.

Sometimes things are unfair, that's why you try to make it better.

It's what he tells himself, anyway. It makes the idea of being king just a little bit better.

But when he watches Wilhelm's small hands clench into fists as he sniffles, trying to get his eyes to dry, Erik decides that maybe little Wille doesn't need to be so strong.

—

Or, in which Erik has sort of known all along, but doesn't die. A story over time.

Notes

Hello. Look at me posting another work. I have not proof-read this one either. I'm sorry.

But yeah I was inspired by the many "Erik has always known/had an inkling" fics and was like "now what if we just smush this with the "Erik isn't dead" AU. And here we go.

Anyway, enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Erik is four when he gets a baby brother. “Wilhelm,” is what he’s going to be called. That’s what his mother says. Erik, four as he is, thinks that “Wilhelm” takes far too long to say. He decides to call the little bundle of smiles, tears, and small brown eyes “Wille.”

—

Erik, eight now, watches Wilhelm chase after butterflies on the lawn. Erik watches the grin on his face, the unbridled curiosity when one of them lands on his finger.

—

A ten year old Erik watches as Wilhelm cries.

Their nanny telling him that it’s not fair to eat the carrots but not the broccoli is the source of his tears. To a ten year old crown prince who is being raised to carry a nation, he thinks it’s a stupid thing to be upset over.

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—

Erik is fourteen when he comes home from school and slings his backpack over a chair, turning around as Wilhelm crashes into him. Erik just laughs, ruffling his hair and spinning him around in a hug.

Then they sit down and Erik listens as Wilhelm talks all about a sweet and smart black-haired boy in his class, in a way that’s just a little bit too familiar to Erik.

It reminds him of August, talking about a girl at Hillerska.

It clicks later that night, when he bolts upright. Huh. Wille has a crush on a boy in his class.

Erik is fourteen and slightly wiser about his baby brother when he pulls out his phone and googles “*LGBTQ+ Community*,” staying up for another hour checking the search results.

—

Erik almost fifteen when he finds Wilhelm curled up under a desk, crying and struggling to put enough air in his lungs. “

Wille,” he asks. “What happened?”

No answer comes, though, and he has to figure it out himself, from the little whimpers.

“Oh my god I’m dying.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“Please, no, please, I’m so sorry.”

Each one is a tiny needle prick in Erik’s heart, a reminder that he hasn’t protected little Wille as well as he should’ve.

Erik figures it out, finally, taking Wilhelm’s hands, and asking him to breathe.

Wilhelm can breathe again, and he gives Erik the tiniest of smiles, but Erik’s already far, far away in his own mind.

—

Erik is fifteen when he tells his parents that he thinks Wille should see a counselor or therapist.

They brush him off, asking what could possibly necessitate that.

Erik tells them of the day he found Wilhelm having a panic attack under a desk.

They tell him to stop spoiling Wilhelm, and that he needs to toughen up anyway.

Erik decides that even more now, he needs to protect Wilhelm.

—

Erik is sixteen when he clears of a weekend to binge a show with Wilhelm. It’s his turn to pick one, the last one —Wilhelm’s choice— having been Avatar the Last Airbender. They didn’t sleep, and Erik showed up to class the next Monday with purple bags under his eyes and the largest grin on his face August had ever seen. He fell asleep

while the teacher was explaining trigonometry.

So Erik chooses a similar show in the same vein. “The Dragon Prince,” it’s called.

Erik watches Wilhem’s face when two queens, not sisters, run a kingdom together.

He watches Wilhelm’s face when the assassin and the smith, both men, kiss.

He watches, but he can’t decipher the expression that he gets.

So twelve hours later, he starts a conversation.

“I like dthe two queens who ran a kingdom.” He turns to Wilhelm. “I wish there was a kingdom in the real wold like that. Or even just a… prince or princess.”

Wilhelm smiles. “You can be the first.”

Erik huffs a laugh. Not quite what he was going for, but it’ll do.

“Or you.”

Wilhelm breaks away from his gaze.

“Wille?”

Wilhelm nods.

“I’m not kidding.”

Wilhelm doesn’t meet his eyes as he nods.

—

Erik is sixteen and a half in June, and offhandedly suggests that his parents hang a rainbow flag somewhere on the palace, as a show of support to the public.

When they say no, he feels a pang in his chest for Wilhelm, who’s been oddly quiet for the last couple minutes.

—

Erik is nearly seventeen when there’s a mass shooting in a gay club in America.

He's terrified that the faces on the TV could be his little brother.

—

Erik is seventeen when their mother asks the now-thirteen year old Wilhelm if he's got a girlfriend.

Wilhelm shrugs, and their mother presses on, asking if there are any pretty girls.

Wilhelm nods, and describes a few in his class, with one in particular that he enjoys working with in group projects.

Erik listens carefully, somewhat confused by the time desert comes.

He's aware sexuality isn't binary gay or straight, but he's still not sure what's going on in Wille's head.

He resolves himself to be there for him either way.

—

Erik is eighteen when he watches his brother fade away into a carefully crafted mask that just smiles at social functions.

In all of Wilhelm's spare time stares a the ceiling listening to music.

Erik wonders what they did wrong, why his excitable curious baby brother feels like a shell of what he used to be.

Then he remembers the days he's drunk several cups of coffee staying up late to do extra credit, to do another project, to do another call, to review another policy, anything so he wouldn't be alone with his thoughts. He remembers the day where his mother was yelling at him and he grabbed his forearm, surprised later that night when he found bloodstains on the sleeve and crescent shaped indents on his arm.

And he thinks that maybe he understands.

—

Erik is nineteen when the smiling mask turns into a blank mask.

He tries harder to protect Wilhelm from the world, taking on more responsibility with his mother so she'll leave Wilhelm alone. He works late on the weekdays so that he can have a few precious hours with Wilhelm on the weekend, where he despairs over the fact that he's

lucky if he can pull one smile out of him, the entire day.

—

Erik is twenty when Wilhelm gets in a bar fight.

“Wille,” he asks. “What happened?”

Wilhelm is curled into a ball on a chair, knuckles white as he grasps his arm.

Erik gently tries to pry his hand off.

Wilhelm sighs, and tells him about the awful man in the bar, who called his friend a slut, and called him the f-slur. Wilhelm looks at him with rare emotion, a blazing anger that’s taken over his whole being.

Or maybe not, Erik notes when he sees terror hiding behind anger in Wilhelm’s eyes.

—

Erik is twenty and exhausted when he starts the car engine.

When they get to Hillerska, Erik watches as Wilhelm’s eyes linger on the tan boy in the back of the choir.

Erik watches in amazement as it pulls one of the first grins out of Wille he’s seen in months.

Erik is convinced that maybe, just maybe, he was onto something when he was fourteen.

—

Erik is twenty and well studied on the state of LGBTQ+ rights in Sweden when he calls his brother, telling him to go shake some hands outside.

Wilhelm smiles and laughs, telling him it’d be weird to show up at all, and Erik blinks once, trying to register where his porcelain mask went.

He doesn’t care though, because any reason Wilhelm is happy is good enough for him.

—

Erik is twenty and convinced a miracle has happened when Wilhelm

comes back for a weekend and he actually laughs at some of Erik's jokes on the car-ride to the palace.

He's stunned.

Then he watches the way Wille looks out the window and runs a finger across his own hand, and listens as he says he almost stayed at school over the weekend, Erik knows.

"You've met someone, haven't you?"

He grins.

Wilhelm blushes.

"Hello?"

"Yes, okay, but-" He shakes his head. "We're not like… dating or anything, I don't really-"

He pauses again. "Can we just-"

Erik nods, grinning. "I get it, I get it. You don't have to tell me any details."

It's a lie, he desperately wants to know who's made his little brother so happy, and if the world is going to put both of them through hell for it just because he's not a girl.

Wilhelm just groans, flustered.

—

Erik is twenty and terrified for his little brother when they watch a movie on a computer in his bedroom.

He watches as the credits roll, and Wilhelm flops forward.

"Will you tell me about the person you met?" He asks.

Wilhelm stares at the ceiling. He doesn't respond.

Erik watches as Wilhelm's chest begins to rise and fall faster than it should.

He watches as Wilhelm recoils, running away from imaginary monsters.

He grabs Wilhelm's hands and tells him to breathe, waiting until he breathes again.

The tears don't go away though.

Erik waits until the last one dries, and pets Wilhelm's head.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to, Wille."

Wilhelm shakes his head.

"No, I want to, I just-"

He sighs.

"His name is Simon."

Erik nods, smiling encouragingly. He's terrified that the source of his brother's happiness is going to be the source of absolute hell he gets from others, but smiles for Wille's sake.

Wilhelm raises his eyebrows, eyes still red and puffy.

"Is that okay?"

"What, that his name is Simon? Yeah, I don't have anything against the name Simon," He jokes.

Wilhelm huffs, staring at him. "No, that he's…"

He looks down. "A boy."

Erik pulls his baby brother into a hug. "Of course. Yes. Completely."

Erik feels warm water on his shirt.

Wilhelm cries again.

By the end of the night, Wilhelm is grinning though, somehow even happier than before.

And Erik thinks that maybe, just maybe, he's done an okay job of protecting him.

—

Erik is still twenty when he's put in a coma through a car accident.

—

Erik is nearly twenty one when he wakes up.

—

Erik is twenty one when he realizes that he didn't protect Wilhelm enough.

But that's okay, because Wilhelm is miraculously strong enough to get through being in a sex tape, being outed, all of it.

Even if Erik finds him curled up on his bed, unable to drag himself out and face the world.

—

Erik is twenty one and horrified at his mother for trying to force Wilhelm to say that everything is fake.

He resolves himself to the fact that even if he can't protect Wille, he can support him.

And so for the first time he breaks his reputation as a perfect crown prince, and raises his voice at his mother, begging, commanding, pleading her not to do this.

—

Erik is twenty one and thrilled when his brother confirms that he's indeed dating Simon, for the whole country to see.

Because after the interview ends, Wilhelm grins so wide it could split his face in half.

—

Erik is twenty one and conflicted when he sees the cracked porcelain mask that Wilhelm has put together for himself, stronger than before.

Wilhelm is different.

His soft heart is guarded, more careful, and even though he's learned to compromise with the expectations put upon him, he's never completely healed from the pressure and scandals.

Erik is just grateful that his heart is still soft, and not the stone that

Erik's seen so many turn to.

—

Erik is twenty one and a half when he hands his brother a package.

"Open it," he urges.

Wilhelm tears it open, a childhood habit he's never grown out of, and pulls the contents out.

He unwraps it.

Erik watches as he grins, wrapping the rainbow flag around himself.

Erik smiles at Wilhelm, who's already crushing him in a hug.

—

Erik is a few months away from twenty two when he meets Simon.

He's polite and cautious, almost irritatingly so, until Wilhelm makes a joke and he bursts into laughter, making a jab back at him.

Wilhelm glows.

Erik decides then that no matter what he thinks of Simon, he'll support the two of them.

But as fate would have it, Erik and Simon share a love of alt rock and ruffling Wille's hair, and their friendship blooms.

—

Erik is twenty two when he walks into his brother's room and sees him and his boyfriend kissing, hands beginning to wander.

He slams the door shut, and hears giggle from inside.

"Sorry!" one of them calls.

Erik huffs a laugh. "I already involuntarily watched the sex tape multiple times on the news, I don't need to see this again."

A groans comes from Wilhelm, as he shouts. "Fuck off, Erik."

Erik laughs. "Sorry."

—

Erik is still twenty two when he attends Wilhelm's graduation. He smiles the whole time.

—

Erik is twenty three when he brings a box of American doughnuts to Wilhelm's room, where he's sulking after fighting with Simon.

They'll be fine in a couple days, Erik knows, but he can't resist an opportunity to spoil his brother with doughnuts and movies.

—

Erik is thirty when he ascends to the throne.

It's thankfully not because either of their parents have died, it's simply because their mother decided it was getting to be time.

During his coronation, his family sits in the first row of benches in the church.

It's a welcome point of focus among the sea of cameras.

And when the crowd begins to chant "Long live the king," Erik is sure he can hear Wilhelm's voice over all the others.

—

Erik is just over thirty when Wilhelm opens an LGBTQ+ rights foundation.

—

Erik is thirty two when he attends Simon and Wilhelm's wedding as Wilhelm's best man.

It's a day of immeasurable joy for everyone there, but there's something else in the air.

Erik thinks it's pride. Pride and sense of victory over the countless challenges Wille and Simon have faced.

—

Erik is thirty eight when he and Wilhelm are playing a card game after

dinner.

“Thank you.” Wilhelm says, looking up at him.

Erik tilts his head, confused.

“For supporting me.”

And Erik knows that he’s always made the right decision.

End Notes

Thanks for reading!! Comments and Kudos very much appreciated!!!

:D

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!